FILM

"DHOFAR"

"Dhofar" is a powerful film about revolution in the Arabian peninsula. It combines the slow-moving beauty of "Ramparts of Clay" (a film portraying daily life in a Tunisian village) with the force of "Battle of Algiers". In a space of 75 minutes, the audience gains a sense of the lives of the Dhofari people in their struggle for liberation against Qabus, the sultan of Oman, who is a puppet of Britain and the United States.

The film conveys the triumphs of the people's liberation army against all the Sultan's mercenary forces and his modern weapons. They triumph, despite their poor weapons, because "it is revolutionary theory that guides the gun". The military advance of the Dhofaris is described by a political cadre, who explains how its is possible to keep Salalah, the capital, under siege for days at a time. The film recounts their taking of a three-hundred mile road (one of the few roads in the region) which had formerly been used by the sultan's troops for staging attacks upon the liberated areas.

During the film, maps underscore the action, allowing the audience to take stock of the achievements that have been made under the leadership of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Occupied Arab Gulf (PFLOAG). In an interview with a member of the Front, past and present conditions are dramatically contrasted. We discover that the liberation army's work is not limited solely to the Herculean task of fighting the imperialists and their mercenaries; rather, the revolutionary forces "fight with one hand and dig with the other." A road has been tediously constructed by hand so that supplies can be transferred throughout the liberated region.

Construction of irrigation facilities is likewise by hand, although the film gives us a glimpse of the only water pump in the entire country. Because even simple equipment is difficult to obtain, manual labor faces a hard challenge from the rocky, bushy terrain pictured throughout the film.

Despite the Sultan's efforts to divide tribes by urging them to compete with and exploit one another, the revolutionary programs of the Front are eliminating family and tribal rivalries through a strong emphasis upon collective efforts to develop a standard of living that was impossible under feudalism. The Front's efforts to liberate women and children are highlighted throughout the film. Bringing women out of feudal subservience into the struggle to create a new, socialist society is a long and difficult process, but interviews with women members of the Front project how women stand to gain by destroying oppressive traditions that date back many centuries. The persistent work of the Front is contributing to the elimination of such customs as forced marriage, absence of property rights for women, or absence of the right to divorce.

In the liberated areas which now comprise two-thirds of Dhofar, the old oppressive forms of division of labor (planting, herding, etc.) are dying out. As the film shows, a non-specialized division of labor now serves to erase differences that prevented rational use of land and water.

Political education is continually presented as an integral part of the process of organizing the masses. In the film, we are told that the sultan (Qabus) "is a sly agent of the British". Although Qabus now tries to disguise himself as a would-be reformer, in contrast to his deposed autocratic father, Said Ibn Taimur, the masses receive no benefits.

Because the practice of medicine (along with wearing shoes and eating oranges) is still banned in Dhofar, ritual chanting over patients was originally used to effect a "cure", but the Front's medical cadres have patiently shown that scientific approach and not ceremonies prevents illness. The film explains that trachoma and dysentery are common diseases in Dhofar, but peasants and tribesmen have travelled hundreds of miles to reach the few tent-clinics that exist in the liberated areas.

How, in a country where medical practice is illegal, have some persons obtained training? Only through going to friendly countries or through attending the Lenin school.

This is the highlight of the film. The Lenin School (described in Resistance #8, Winter 1973) is the country's only school. Here, 400 children, some of whom have traveled as much as 300 miles on foot to attend, clearly show a strong, disciplined desire to learn. Academic instruction initially consists of learning arithmetic, Arabic, and English within eight months. (English is taught for use as a technical language.) In addition, the students learn to grow their own crops, slaughter animals for food, and cook. A collective system ensures that food supplies are adequate for all, even though meat is still a rarity.

Within the Lenin school, three leading instructors teach the oldest, who in turn teach younger students. As the film showed, the atmosphere of the Lenin School bears no traces of the customary "pupil-teacher" contradiction, because the entire educational process centers around collective development of political awareness and usable skills. In the Lenin school, each teaching session is closed in the name of the Revolution.

From the hard effort to create educated cadres who can serve society, the film brings us back to the actual field of battle, with enemy planes streaking overhead. British strafing of inhabitants and livestock in the liberated areas has become a frequent fact of life, but it has brought young and old, female and male closer together in the struggle against the sultan and his imperialist sponsors.

In a political sense, the film conveys the extent of the oppressive role of the sultan and British colonialism. A minor shortcoming may be the film's lack of reference to the American military and economic stake in Dhofar and throughout the Arab Gulf--where more than half of the world's oil reserves are.

The compelling final scene of "Dhofar" shows the people' army taking the offensive. "The people are in the leadership and will fight until victory."

One leaves the film full of excitement, with a strong sense of solidarity and support for the struggle, for we know that their fight is ours, their successes our successes.

NOTE: The film "DHOFAR" is available from
Third World-Newsreel
26 West 20th Street-3rd Flr.
New York, New York

Copies are available both in Arabic and in English.